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SUBJECT Sam Cummings

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✓ ALEX CHADWICK: One person who should know the international arms market is Sam Cummings. He is the founder and president of Inter-Arms, which sells more weapons on the private market than any other company in the world. Eighty-five percent of the market, Cummings says. Though he quickly adds, these are fairly small, lightweight arms, not tanks and artillery. Cummings has been in the business for 30 years, every since he quit buying weapons for the CIA and went into business for himself. He says it has been common knowledge on the weapons market that Iran wanted the TOW anti-tank missiles which the U.S. provided. In fact, he says, the Iranians have been after the weapons for years.

SAM CUMMINGS: They have been on the Iranians' demands for, oh, over two years now we've had that request from the Iranians for, specifically, TOW missiles, because the Shah had bought a lot of them and they're trained in that type of missile. They are quite open about it, the Iranians. After all, for them it's not illegal, it's quite legal. They want to get the material and they want to pay for it at whatever rate they can, but they'll bargain to the end.

CHADWICK: If you wanted to get a TOW missile, could you?

CUMMINGS: No.

CHADWICK: You couldn't.

CUMMINGS: No. They're not available on the market, which is exactly what we've told the Iranians for the last couple of years. We say we just can't supply them, and we tell them no

one can supply them.

CHADWICK: If they were available, would you sell them to the Iranians?

CUMMINGS: No, because we can't get a license from the United States Government or the British Government. If the business is licenseable, we try to do it in order to maintain our position in the market. If it's not, we just say good luck to everybody, bye-bye, we can't help.

CHADWICK: Are these things being done most of the time, in your opinion -- that is, are arms going on to the Iranians from the United States, from Israel, from Western European countries?

CUMMINGS: Yes.

CHADWICK: They are.

CUMMINGS: Yes. And have been since the beginning of that war.

CHADWICK: What countries are they coming from?

CUMMINGS: In the case of going to Iran, they are going from many NATO countries, many East Bloc countries, located in Asia as well as Europe, and from Latin America, primarily Brazil and Argentina. And those deliveries have been going on almost since the war began.

CHADWICK: Is this something that is known just to you, or just to arms dealers, or are governments fully aware of this?

CUMMINGS: Well, certainly governments, with their intelligence-collection facilities, are fully aware of it. And it's pretty well known in the trade.

CHADWICK: Almost all these countries that you mentioned, certainly the NATO countries and the United States, do have embargoes on against shipping weapons to Iran, don't they?

CUMMINGS: Yes. Broadly speaking, yes. But there have been ways around those embargoes, in many ways. And those ways have been utilized by the Iranians.

CHADWICK: Well, what are those ways?

CUMMINGS: Well, if you use a dummy destination with fake licensing or fake orders, you can buy the material and load it, and off it will go into the wild blue yonder, either by air or by sea. And then you just change the destination en route.

CHADWICK: Not very complicated.

CUMMINGS: It isn't really difficult. But you have to recognize that you're violating the law in the event you don't have government aid.

CHADWICK: People...

CUMMINGS: You see, the public is of the view that the armaments business, in every sense, is all black. The black part, with all due respect, is entirely handled by the government, in one form or another. Just as 99 percent of the overt arms business is done by governments in our times, so is 99 percent of the covert, or even a higher percentage. The day of the private so-called merchant of death just doesn't exist in our era, except in the sense that, as taxpayers, we are all merchants of death.

CHADWICK: Sam Cummings of Inter-Arms, an international weapons company based in London and in Alexandria, Virginia